

City businesses honored as commuter-friendly

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STAMFORD — For the countless professionals who spend their commutes idling on the state's congested highways, Stamford may seem far from the ideal place to spend a workday.

However, 10 city businesses' efforts to ease the frustration and environmental effects of sitting in traffic have earned them spots on the fourth annual New England Environmental Protection Agency's [EPA] Best Workplaces for Commuters list.

The list is comprised of about 100 businesses, including 31 Connecticut workplaces. To qualify, businesses must offer a number of commuter benefits as well as access to commuter information and an emergency ride home program.

Merle Spiegel, senior director of corporate communications at Purdue Pharma L.P., said the pharmaceutical company employed several commuter incentives when it moved from Norwalk to its current Tresser Boulevard location.

"[The decision to develop incentives] was a combination of our desire to have as many people as possible move with us, and our commitment to easing transportation problems on I-95," Spiegel said.

Purdue Pharma pays up to \$100 per month for commuting expenses, and also supplies \$50 for station parking at the "home-end" of the employee's trip. About one-third of all employees commute by train, she said.

Spiegel said Purdue Pharma, which was recently honored by Connecticut Light & Power for its energy-efficient lighting, includes such elements because of a commitment to the surrounding community.

"It's about concern for the environment, but it's also a quality of life issue," Spiegel said. "We strongly feel that if the roads are strangled by traffic, businesses in the area will be losing out because people won't want to live in Fairfield County."

Time Warner Cable, a television cable, online, and digital phone service which houses its corporate headquarters on Harbor Drive, also made its way onto the Best Workplaces for Commuters list. The company offers travel vouchers to defer the cost of travel, a shuttle to and from the Stamford train station, and a "guaranteed ride home" program for those who work after hours, corporate spokesman Mark Harrad said.

Harrad said the incentives can serve as a recruiting tool, as potential employees recognize the lower cost, and stress level, they would incur by using the commuter benefits.

"It allows people to depend on alternate means of transportation other than their car," Harrad said. "I'm sure that's especially appreciated as the price of gasoline goes up."

Matt Broder, spokesman for Pitney Bowes, a mail and messaging equipment company with world headquarters on Elmcroft Road, said the business made the list because of several commuter benefits. Incentives, Broder said, include the company's partnership with NuRide, a "frequent flier" for train commuters which allows them to earn points to spend at retail outlets.

Broder also said Pitney Bowes has several offices in outer Fairfield County areas like Danbury, Newtown and Shelton, and that employees may work a few days per week out of these offices in order to decrease travel time.

"The over-arching philosophy is we want our people to be as productive as they can be and that doesn't necessarily include traveling a great distance to get to work, or traveling for a great amount of time over a short distance to get to work," Broder said.

Commuter incentives, he said, not only benefit the environment but can also help draw employees to the city.

"It really begins with wanting to attract and retain the most talented people that you can," Broder said. "It's been well documented that it's hard to bring people to downtown Stamford because it's so arduous to get here and that serves as a disincentive to a lot of people."